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RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3577  
RUEHPT/AMCONSUL PERTH 0475  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0755  
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SUBJECT: MIDDLE EAST -- UNDERSCORING THE USG'S COMMITMENT  
TO PEACE

REF: A. JAKARTA 3166 B. JAKARTA 725

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¶1. (U) This message is Sensitive But Unclassified -- Please handle accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The DCM and the Palestinian Ambassador to Indonesia participated in a public discussion on the Annapolis Conference on November 28. In a country where for many years such public discussions have typically turned into blistering attacks on the U.S., the audience that attended this event sponsored by a leading Muslim organization was refreshingly open-minded about the prospects for progress. Reacting to Annapolis, media commentary here has been mixed, while noting that there is still much work needed to be done by the parties. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) CORDIAL DISCUSSION: On November 28, the DCM joined Palestinian Ambassador Fariz Mehdawi in a public discussion on the "Viability of the Annapolis Conference and the Future of the Palestinian State." The English-language discussion was organized on short notice by the Centre for Dialogue and Cooperation Among Civilizations, a think-tank founded by Din Syamsuddin, chair of Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's second-largest Muslim organization with over 30 million members.

¶4. (SBU) About 50 influential Indonesians and diplomats attended, including ambassadors from Egypt and Lebanon, top level civil society figures, Muslim leaders and youth, senior foreign affairs officials, members of parliament, and several journalists. Syamsuddin, despite his recent public skepticism regarding the Annapolis Conference, set the cordial tone of the discussion by stating the evening would be a friendly exchange of views. The moderator, Uni Lubis, head of news at ANTV, a local television channel, began the discussion by describing her recent visit to Israel and Palestinian areas as part of a delegation of senior Indonesian journalists invited by Israel.

¶5. (SBU) ENVOY'S REMARKS: Palestinian Ambassador Fariz Mehdawi led off with remarks that the international community

is essential to solving the conflict, adding, "President Bush said two states is the solution, and he is the first president to state this clearly." He said the U.S. realizes the strategic importance of solving this issue because of the danger that rising radicalism poses to the world. Other key players in the Middle East are also actively supporting the peace process in Annapolis. Secretary Rice has been visiting the region frequently and the two sides have been working hard to establish a dialogue. After so many broken promises, Annapolis is a starting point, Mehdawi said, adding: "We are optimistic. We hope that all the parties that come to Annapolis will remain with us." One negative theme in his remarks was the need for the U.S. to actively pressure Israel for concessions.

¶6. (SBU) STRESSING KEY POINTS: DCM highlighted the Department's themes on the Annapolis Conference and the Joint Understanding. The DCM noted that the conference is the most serious engagement between Israel and Palestine in a long time, an opportunity that the parties should seize, and that there is a timeline which the two parties have agreed upon. Annapolis is the beginning of a long process, he said. President Bush is the first President to state the two-state solution so clearly. DCM added that the goals of the 40-plus countries with representatives in Annapolis were the same -- Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

¶7. (SBU) REBUTTAL ON HAMAS ISSUE: The DCM rebuffed Ambassador Mehdawi's criticism that the U.S. has been a neutral bystander by noting our very proactive role. He responded to a comment by an M.P. from a Muslim political party that Hamas should be part of the process by pointing out that "it is entirely unreasonable to expect one party to negotiate with another party which does not recognize its

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right to exist." The DCM commended Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda's participation at the conference and the valuable input he has given to Secretary Rice in prior discussions. Referring to Indonesia's refusal to recognize Israel, the DCM noted that this discussion in Jakarta would have been even better if Israel were sitting on the panel.

¶8. (SBU) AUDIENCE BALANCED: Audience comment was surprisingly free of diatribe against the U.S. and Israel. One of Indonesia's leading intellectual lights, Clara Joewono, Vice Chair of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), said she is optimistic for the first time in years because of this initiative. She added that President Bush's statement that Palestinians should have a state is significant. One elderly woman, a civil society leader, who has visited Israel, reflected the general tone of the audience by saying, "I don't know the essence of the Annapolis conference but I do hope that it can achieve peace. The Palestinians and Israelis are ultimately brothers and sisters."

¶9. (SBU) MEDIA PUSH GOI ROLE: Reacting to Annapolis, Indonesian media has devoted extensive news coverage and several editorial pieces to the conference. Foreign Minister Wirajuda was quoted before the conference on November 24 as saying, "By participating in the conference, Indonesia hopefully can contribute to peace and help end conflict between Arabs and Israelis." Several editorials have urged Indonesia to take an active and neutral role to promote dialogue between the two sides. English-language daily "The Jakarta Post" commented November 29 that Indonesia "can play its part" by convincing Hamas it will not get international sympathy if it continues to deny the existence of Israel. Leading daily "Kompas" commented November 28, "Indonesia must change its approach from an exclusive one to an inclusive one, to become a mediator, a neutral party so that Indonesia better understands what both parties want." A small

anti-Annapolis Conference rally was held by several Muslim organizations in front of the U.S. Embassy on November 27. The rally received little coverage.

¶10. (SBU) U.S. ROLE APPRECIATED: Indonesian officials and the public have been very skeptical of the Middle East peace process in the past and such public discussions as this one usually produce criticism of the U.S. The climate of the November 28 discussion sponsored by Muhammadiyah was very constructive, however, perhaps partly due to its English-language format. Besides our clear and popular statement of support for a two-state policy, the Indonesian government participation in the conference seemed to raise the credibility of the process for Indonesians. Over all, Indonesians seem positive about what happened at Annapolis, but realistic that much more progress is required by parties.  
HUME